

Thomas Merton

THE
SEVEN
STOREY
MOUNTAIN

The autobiography of a young man
who led a full and worldly life, and
then, at the age of 26, entered
a Trappist monastery.

*"May well prove to be of permanent
interest in the history of religious ex-
perience."*

EVELYN WAUGH

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**THE SEVEN STOREY
MOUNTAIN**

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"I regard this as a book which may well prove to be of permanent interest in the history of religious experience. . . . No one can afford to neglect this clear account of a complex religious process. Mr. Merton writes in an easy colloquial manner which should prove popular to countless readers."

CLIFTON FADIMAN:

"I found *The Seven Storey Mountain* more than merely interesting, because it deals, as do so few modern autobiographies (or indeed books of any sort), not with what happens *to* a man, but with what happens inside him—that is, inside his soul. It should hold the attention of Catholic and non-Catholic alike."

GRAHAM GREENE:

"It is a rare pleasure to read an autobiography with a pattern and meaning valid for all of us. *The Seven Storey Mountain* is a book one reads with a pencil so as to make it one's own."

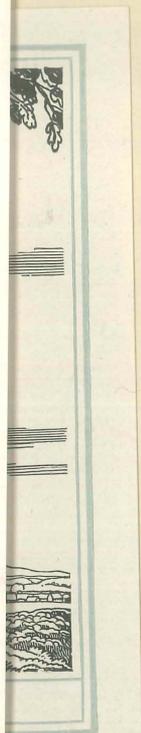
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"It is to a book like this that men will turn a hundred years from now to find out what went on in the heart of man in this cruel century."

MSGR. FULTON J. SHEEN:

"The autobiography of Thomas Merton is a Twentieth Century form of the *Confessions of St. Augustine*."

(SEE BACK FLAP FOR DESCRIPTION OF BOOK)



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The Seven Storey Mountain

Books by Thomas Merton

THIRTY POEMS

A MAN IN THE DIVIDED SEA

FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE

EXILE ENDS IN GLORY

(The Life of Mother Mary Berchmans)

THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN

THOMAS MERTON

The Seven Storey Mountain

“FOR I TELL YOU THAT GOD IS ABLE OF THESE STONES
TO RAISE UP CHILDREN TO ABRAHAM.”

Harcourt, Brace and Company :: *New York*

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first edition

The poem on page 404, "For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943" is quoted from *Thirty Poems* by Thomas Merton, copyright 1944 by Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery and used by permission of the publisher, New Directions.

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had once played the organ. I think the reason for this was that God wanted me to climb back the way I had fallen down. I had come to despise the Church of England, the "Protestant Episcopal Church," and He wanted me to do away with what there was of pride and self-complacency even in that. He would not let me become a Catholic, having behind me a rejection of another church that was not the right kind of a rejection, but one that was sinful in itself, rooted in pride, and expressed in contumely.

This time I came back to Zion Church, not to judge it, not to condemn the poor minister, but to see if it could not do something to satisfy the obscure need for faith that was beginning to make itself felt in my soul.

It was a nice enough church. It was pleasant to sit there, in the pretty little white building, with the sun pouring through the windows, on Sunday mornings. The choir of surpliced men and women and the hymns we all sang did not exactly send me up into ecstasy: but at least I no longer made fun of them in my heart. And when it came time to say the Apostles' Creed, I stood up and said it, with the rest, hoping within myself that God would give me the grace someday to really believe it.

The minister was called Mr. Riley. Pop had always called him "Dr. Riley" to his great embarrassment. Despite the Irish name, he detested Catholics, like most Protestant ministers. He was always very friendly to me and used to get into conversations about intellectual matters and modern literature, even men like D. H. Lawrence with whom he was thoroughly familiar.

It seems that he counted very much on this sort of thing—considered it an essential part of his ministry to keep up with the latest books, and to be able to talk about them, to maintain contact with people by that means. But that was precisely one of the things that made the experience of going to his church such a sterile one for me. He did not like or understand what was considered most "advanced" in modern literature and, as a matter of fact, one did not expect him to; one did not demand that of him. Yet it was modern literature and politics that he talked about, not religion and God. You felt that the man did not know his vocation, did not know what he was supposed to be. He had taken upon himself some function in society which was not his and which was, indeed, not a necessary function at all.

When he did get around to preaching about some truth of the Christian religion, he practically admitted in the pulpit, as he did in private to anyone who cared to talk about it, that he did not

THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN

is the autobiography of a young man who led a full and worldly life and then, at the age of 26, entered a Trappist monastery. Thomas Merton, already known as a poet, tells his life story from his birth in 1915 to his present existence as a monk. His book was written in the monastery at Gethsemani, Kentucky. *The Seven Storey Mountain* is the extraordinary testament of an intensely active and brilliant young American who decided to withdraw from the world only after he had fully immersed himself in it. Merton uses the seven-tiered mountain (Dante's image of Purgatory) as a symbol of the modern world.

In every sense a man of his times—the period between the two wars—Thomas Merton spent his childhood in America and France. His father was English; his mother, an American Quaker. At twenty, an orphan, he left England for America and enrolled at Columbia. Concerned over the social and economic injustices of modern life, he joined a young Communist group. Later he worked at a Catholic settlement house in Harlem. It was several years after his conversion that he entered the Trappist order.

Frater M. Louis, as he is called in the Order, tells his story with wit, intensity, and exuberance. Part of the interest of the book is provided by the fact that he writes from a monk's cell, with knowledge and authority, of modern artists like Picasso, Joyce, and Duke Ellington. The later section of the book forms a fascinating account of the daily life of a Trappist.

Thomas Merton has published three volumes of poetry, *Thirty Poems*, *The Man in the Divided Sea*, and *Figures for an Apocalypse*. He received the Catholic Press Association award for poetry in 1948.

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The Abbey of Our Lady of
Gethsemani, Kentucky



Trappists at work in the fields
(Author on the left)



Photograph by Daniel Francis Connell

The Cloister: Monks in procession